



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
Headquarters, United States Central Command
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To the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and Civilians of US Central Command:

Having now been in command for a little over a month, I would like to share with you my initial assessment of the situation in the Central Command Area of Responsibility.

It is clear that we serve in a critical region at a critical time. The challenges in the Central Command area are many. As we work together with our interagency and coalition partners, the contributions that each of you make will be of significant importance as we strive to address the many challenges in the region.

In Iraq, we are building on the progress achieved by Coalition and Iraqi forces in the course of difficult operations. Those operations have produced encouraging results, and Iraqi forces are increasingly shouldering the security burdens in their country. As Ambassador Crocker, General Odierno, and I have cautioned, however, the situation in Iraq remains fragile and reversible. Numerous difficult issues loom on the horizon in the "Land of the Two Rivers." The year ahead will contain significant challenges, among them: provincial, district, and national elections; resilient enemies still carrying out deadly attacks; lingering ethno-sectarian mistrust and competition; malign external influences; and a national referendum on the US-Iraq Strategic Agreement. As we continue to reduce our forces and transition security responsibilities to the Iraqi Security Forces, supporting our Iraqi and Embassy partners and continuing the pressure on the extremists will be vitally important to solidifying and building on the gains that have been achieved.

In Afghanistan, we and our Afghan partners are in a tough fight. The Coalition effort has helped develop increasingly capable Afghan military units and has supported infrastructure development in a country where the task is typically more construction than reconstruction. But, in spite of the progress made in a number of areas, the difficulties in Afghanistan are considerable. The Taliban and other elements that make up the extremist "syndicate," aided by groups operating from sanctuaries outside Afghanistan, have significantly increased the levels of violence in Afghanistan and contested control of important areas in the country. Slowly-developing Afghan governmental institutions have been challenged by the security situation and have yet to achieve the necessary levels of competence, integrity, capacity, and legitimacy. The year ahead will be a test for the effort in Afghanistan. The effort there will rely heavily on the skill, courage, determination, and sheer force of will of those on the ground as we deploy additional forces and help our Afghan partners as they conduct elections and strive to achieve progress in the security, economic, and governmental arenas.

It is clear that the effort in Afghanistan will require a sustained, significant commitment. It will also require a regional approach that includes considerable support for Pakistan, which faces substantial difficulties of its own but has shown new awareness of the need to deal with the

extremists who have not only exported violence outside Pakistan's borders but have also demonstrated the threat they pose to Pakistan's very existence.

At sea and in the sky throughout the CENTCOM region, our maritime and air forces are also contributing enormously – not just to the efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in ensuring freedom of navigation, confronting the increase in piracy off the Horn of Africa, interdicting the flow of illegal narcotics, fostering regional cooperation in shared early warning and ballistic missile defense, countering weapons proliferation, working with partners against trans-national extremists, and assisting in the development of security forces throughout the region.

Through CENTCOM's component commands, offices of defense cooperation, and elements in embassies and countries throughout the region, we are also solidifying critical security relationships. The expertise and professionalism of those engaged in these tasks are important elements of America's foreign policy as we work closely with our interagency associates to pursue mutual objectives with partners in the region. These efforts are of considerable importance, as our partnerships with regional and Coalition countries are central to implementing the comprehensive, multilateral solutions necessary to address the complex challenges of the region.

A number of the endeavors in which we are engaged will require sustained, substantial commitment. We need to recognize that reality, just as we need to recognize that some of our efforts will continue to be hard, resource-intensive, and frustrating. As always, success will require determination, innovativeness, initiative, and courage – qualities that you have consistently demonstrated and possess in abundance.

As we enter the holiday season, I want to thank each of you – and each of your families – for the sacrifices you are making as you serve in this critical region. Thanks, as well, for your commitment and your skill as we engage in important missions throughout the CENTCOM region.

It is the greatest of privileges to serve with you.

With respect and appreciation,



David H. Petraeus
General, United States Army
Commanding